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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 AMMAN 008196

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: SADDAM'S ARREST: MOST JORDANIANS SUBDUED;  
JORDAN-BASED IRAQIS THRILLED; PRESS OUTRAGED AT LACK OF A  
FIGHT

Classified By: DCM David Hale for reasons 1.5 (b) and (d).

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SUMMARY  
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1. (C) The reactions of Jordanians and Jordan-based Iraqis to Saddam's arrest varied from sadness at seeing a once powerful Arab leader in such a sorry state, to ridicule for his lack of personal resistance to arrest, to hope that an obstacle to restoring Iraqi security and self-governance has been removed. The GOJ spokesperson hoped the arrest would turn a page on Iraq's history and speed stability and transfer of authority to Iraqis. In contrast, an Islamic Action Front MP expressed support for Saddam as "a symbol of defiance." End Summary.

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GOJ HOPES ARREST LEADS TO IRAQI STABILITY  
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2. (U) Asma Khader, GOJ spokesperson, provided the official government commentary in a statement December 14. She said that for Jordan, the "first and final word on the arrest and fate of Saddam Hussein should be for the Iraqi people." She expressed Jordan's support for the rebuilding of Iraqi institutions, and hoped the arrest of Saddam would turn a page in Iraq's history and hasten the resumption of stability and Iraqi self-governance.

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JORDANIANS HOPE TO MOVE ON  
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3. (C) Reactions of average Jordanians varied from sadness to hope that Saddam's arrest will lead to stabilization in Iraq. Several Palestinian-Jordanians were dismayed that Saddam, once a proud and strong Arab leader who espoused the Palestinian cause, looked like a defeated and disoriented old man. A French journalist who sampled Jordanian public reaction stated that many Jordanians feel "a little sad" about the circumstances of the capture. The journalist added that it was not a sense of humiliation, just sadness at the human deterioration of this once iconoclastic Arab leader. Several Jordanian businessmen welcomed the news of Saddam's arrest and were cautiously optimistic that this would translate into a better business climate between Jordan and Iraq, provided the security situation improves. Farouq al-Hadidi, Secretary General of the Ministry of Trade and Industry, told EconCouns that government officials and other businesspeople he deals with have all welcomed the news and hope that the result will be an end to the attacks and more stability (and Jordanian business) in Iraq.

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SOME STILL SUPPORTING SADDAM  
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4. (C) Not all Jordanians welcomed the arrest, Islamic Action Front MP Azzam Hneidi told the New York Times that Saddam's arrest was "bad news." "To us," Hneidi continued, "Saddam was a symbol of defiance to the U.S. plans in the region. And we support any person who stands in the face of American dominance." Expressing a similar sentiment, Mohammad Najib Rashdan, a Jordanian lawyer, contacted PolFSN to express the interest of a group of 50 Jordanian lawyers in representing Saddam Hussein in court. He stated that President Bush said that Saddam was entitled to a fair trial and that every defendant has a right to legal counsel. He asked that the Embassy pass his request on to the CPA.

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JORDAN-BASED IRAQIS HOPE FOR CLOSURE  
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5. (C) A contact who left Iraq at the age of sixteen told PolOff that she cried tears of joy on hearing the news. April 9, she declared, was the day Baghdad fell, "but December 14 was the day Saddam fell". She went on to say that she was present when the news broke at a gathering with other Jordan-based Iraqis, who all kept asking "Iraq without

Saddam? What will become of us?" She said Iraqis are afraid of the word "democracy", and of the freedom to choose, although she was confident that Iraqis possess the ability and willingness to move forward, given proper guidance. She recounted how a friend in Baghdad told her that she had been living under Saddam's terror for the last thirty years, and everyday when she woke up she felt disgusted at living under his regime. Now, for the first time, "she will wake up and not feel this way any longer."

16. (SBU) The Ambassador encountered a similar reaction when, simultaneously with CPA's press conference, he told a group of Iraqi women leaders attending the Women Waging Peace conference in Amman that Saddam had been captured. The group exploded into applause and ululation.

17. (C) Several Iraqi businessmen in Jordan urged the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to focus on providing jobs for Iraqis as a way to dampen incidents of violence in Iraq. They alluded to an old Iraqi proverb that says, "Get them busy quickly", as a means to ward off trouble from idle hands.

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AND SOME REACTIONS FROM IRAQ  
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18. (U) Manal Omar, country director for NGO Women for Women International in Baghdad, said via e-mail that she was with a group of Iraqi women when the news of Saddam's arrest was announced. According to Omar, almost all broke into tears and sobs, finding it hard to believe that the man who had ripped their lives apart by murdering their husbands, sons and fathers had finally been captured. These women also found it ironic that Saddam, a feared dictator who had brought Iraq to its knees and sold its people for political gain, was now "at the bottom". Omar described the scene after the women had dried their tears as one of joyous shouts of "Allahu Akbar" (God is great) and disbelief that they had witnessed in their lifetimes Saddam's arrest. The Iraqi women then joined to sing old Iraqi songs of joy, "Tonight is an amazing night, a night to celebrate."

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PRESS REACTION: OUTRAGE AND SADNESS  
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19. (U) On December 15, all Jordanian dailies ran headlines regarding Saddam's capture. The center-left Arabic daily Al-Dustour wrote, "The West and Israel welcome the news, joy and sadness in Iraq, Arab public opinion divided". Al-Dustour's editorials stated that while much would be said about Saddam's capture and trial, the focus should be on Iraqis and their chance for a better life once the occupation ends and elections for a representative government occur. Another editorial in Al-Dustour stated that now that Saddam was finished, the U.S. "occupation" was still a "bleeding wound" against Iraq and its people. The semi-official Arabic daily Al-Rai wrote that Saddam was a symbol of Arab nationalism and Arabs had a right to be angry over Arab and Iraqi dignity. It added that Saddam may be over, but Iraq's resistance will not end until it rids itself from the occupiers and regains its independence and sovereignty. Another Al-Rai editorial bemoaned Saddam's undignified and less-than-courageous fall, while yet another warned that Saddam's capture raises the probability of a George Bush re-election, which augurs a grave threat to Arab and international unity.

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COMMENT  
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110. (C) The capture of Saddam Hussein came as a bit of a shock to Jordan, where many believed that he -- "like Osama Bin Laden" -- would be able to evade capture by the Coalition indefinitely. Notwithstanding the continued support of a determined minority, most Jordanians will view Saddam's capture as the real end of his regime, and as a real opportunity to turn the page on the past 23 years and move to a new era.

111. (U) CPA Baghdad minimize considered.

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